

**City of Reading
City Council
Work Session
Monday, August 15, 2011**

Councilors Attending: V. Spencer, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, S. Marmarou, D. Reed, D. Sterner, J. Waltman

Others Attending: L. Kelleher, C. Geffken, S. Harrity, R. Natale, D. Kersley, S. Welz

Vaughn D. Spencer, President of Council, called the Work Session to order at approximately 7:10 pm.

Managing Director's Report

Mr. Nagel read the report distributed to Council at the meeting covering the following:

- Update on the 2010 Strategic Objective based budget
- Consideration of allowing citizens to make various payments via credit card
- Migration of rental housing processes to Hansen

Mr. Marmarou noted the backlog of people coming in to pay bills in City Hall. He stated that while in line today he waited approximately forty (40) minutes to pay one of his City related bills. Mr. Geffken stated that he expects those conditions to improve when all employees are co-located in one office. He stated that allowing credit card payments online may alleviate some of that problem.

Council Staff Report

The Council Staff report is attached to the agenda. Ms. Kelleher stated that the Council Staff report attached to the agenda covers all the major issues. However she did note the news provided by the City's Emergency Management Coordinator that City Council must take some additional NIMS (National Incident Management System) training. She explained that the NIMS program was started after the natural disasters Katrina and Andrew, located in the South, after a disjointed rescue effort. She stated that the federal government mandates states, counties and local municipalities to implement standardized emergency management training and procedures prepared by the federal government. She stated that although NIMS training is focused on disasters it can also be used to handle large events. She stated that State College uses the NIMS system to handle crowds at State College football games.

Graffiti Report

Mr. Harrity distributed an outline about the success of the program that was implemented at the beginning of July 2011. Of note:

- 315 property cleanups have been accomplished and the CSC backlog has been cleared
- Cleanups will continue until November, weather permitting
- Presentations will begin at Reading School District schools over the winter months, along with grant research, grant application and business solicitation
- He stated that in partnership with Reading Beautification Inc. he is seeking community group participation in "paint outs" for graffiti vandalism

Mr. Harrity gave a PowerPoint presentation, showing before and after shots of several properties remediated during the past six (6) weeks.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned the programs ability to remove graffiti on playground equipment. Mr. Harrity stated that they have several chemical solvents that can be used to remediate graffiti from equipment. He stated that the first priority was to abate graffiti visible from the public right-of-way. He stated that playground work will begin this week.

Mr. Marmarou inquired if any apprehensions were made since July. Mr. Harrity stated that a graffiti vandal nicknamed "Scarface" was arrested in June. He noted the great cooperation from the City's police.

Ms. Reed inquired if the program has begun working with the Crime Alert. Mr. Harrity stated that Crime Alert was utilized when he ran the County program and promised to revisit it again. Ms. Reed also suggested that Mr. Harrity utilize surveillance cameras to catch graffiti vandals.

Housing Ordinance

Mr. Kersley introduced Attorney Steve Welz who assisted with the drafting of the new Housing Permit ordinance. He also distributed a process map that will assist in the implementation of the ordinance. He stated that they are shooting for an April 1st annual Housing Permit due date and working to automate the Housing Permit process in Hansen.

Mr. Kersley stated that the Housing Permit ordinance will also clear the current Zoning backlog. He stated that the majority of the properties that will be approved are single-family properties that have had previous housing permits, paid housing permits, and the number of units on the application matches the number of units in City records.

He stated that as single-family rentals are a buy-right use in the PA Municipalities Planning Code zoning permits for rental use would be provided to all rental applications at single family dwellings. He stated approximately half of the properties in the Zoning backlog that will not receive permits are multi-unit properties.

Mr. Kersley reported that 882 reports of illegal rentals have been submitted over the past year, 752 were confirmed as illegal rental units, and 550 of those units have come into compliance. He stated that the two (2) basic mechanisms to identify illegal rentals come from citizen complaints and the City Council office after reviewing real estate transactions and various rental advertisements.

He stated that under the terms of the new ordinance an illegal rental property that it identified would be assessed a fine of \$1,000 per unit for failing to comply with City regulation and then \$100 per unit, per day until the application is submitted.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz suggested mapping out owner occupied versus rental properties and then showing the rental properties that are in compliance. Mr. Kersley stated that that information can be obtained moving forward as the housing permit process and information about parcels will be automated. Ms. Kelleher noted that having this information automated will allow the City to compare the City services drawn for rental properties versus owner-occupied properties. She stated that if it is found that rental properties draw a considerable amount of public services compared to owner-occupied properties limits can be applied on the allowable number of rental units.

Mr. Waltman agreed with the need to punish those who do not comply with the City's regulations. He added that the goal of the prior Housing Permit ordinance was to build up property data within the Hansen system.

Mr. Kersley described IT's work to instill data standardization.

Mr. Spencer noted the need to provide proper staffing around the Blighted Property Review process. He stated that Council staff continues to spend a considerable amount of the day working on Blighted Property matters. Mr. Kersley stated that he is also working with Ms. Kelleher to automate the Blighted Property process that will reduce the current workload. Mr. Geffken stated that the problem with staffing and the Blighted Property process is being addressed.

Mr. Sterner thanked Mr. Kersley, Mr. Welz, and Mr. Natale for their work to rectify the rental housing problems and integrate property information.

Mr. Kersley noted Mr. Natale's initiative to push the Housing Permit and other Housing Permit processes into Hansen and to have them automated.

Mr. Waltman expressed the belief that managing housing is a critical City issue.

Mr. Marmarou inquired about enforcement for student housing. Mr. Natale stated that when investigating student housing the Zoning Enforcement Officer goes to investigate. However enforcement is based on information obtained by the tenants and the landlord's compliance with providing accurate tenant information.

Quality of Life Ordinance Update

Mr. Geffken stated that the Quality of Ordinance was implemented in February/March of 2011. He stated that several modifications have been made since that time. He stated that this proposed ordinance will expand those regulations.

Mr. Kersley stated that the Administration is seeking to add five (5) additional violations which will bring a total of Quality of Life ticketing violations to twenty-four (24). The following new violations are being proposed as follows:

- Work without a Certificate of Appropriateness within Historic Districts
- Satellite Dishes improperly placed without Certificate of Appropriateness permits in Historic Districts
- Requirement to register with a licensed trash hauler
- Requirement to keep the curb and alley free of trash and weeds
- Issuance of temporary dumpster permit

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the problems with illegal dumping in alley ways. She suggested that the Administration waive the fine if the property owner reports the problem to the Citizen's Service Center. Mr. Natale described the process currently in place to waive ticket fees when the property owner reports the illegal dumping prior to the time that a ticket issued.

Mr. Waltman and Mr. Younger expressed concern with requirement for residents to keep the area 18 inches from the curb free of trash and weeds. Mr. Kersley stated that this was borrowed from the Downtown Improvement District's obligation to clean and trash and weeds 18 inches from the curb. There was discussion about this issue.

There was also discussion on a need for the City and City residents to be proactive by reporting problems.

As no other issues were brought forward the Work Session was adjourned at 8:35pm.

Respectfully submitted by Linda A. Kelleher CMC, City Clerk